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C O N F I D E N T I A L HARARE 001599

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR BNEULING  
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MARJORIE COPSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2009  
TAGS: EAGR ECON PGOV ZI EINV  
SUBJECT: BLACK FARMERS GROUP AGREES TO TALKS WITH WHITE  
FARMERS

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher Dell for reason 1.5 d

REF: A) HARARE 849 B) HARARE 912

¶11. (C) Indigenous Commercial Farmers Union (ICFU) President Davison Mugabe told econoff his organization is now prepared to meet formally with representatives of the mainly white Commercial Farmers Union (CFU). Mugabe appears to have overcome his initial reluctance to engage in such talks prior to next March's parliamentary elections (ref b).

¶12. (C) Mugabe acknowledged to us that his organization badly needs the structure and expertise of the CFU. He said he has resisted pressure from Agriculture Minister Joseph Made to explore merger options with the Zimbabwe Farmers Union (ZFU), which is mostly comprised of small-scale communal farmers. The ICFU President argued that the needs and goals of his constituents are more compatible with the white farmers in the CFU - "serious businessmen" - than the black, mostly subsistence farmers in the ZFU. Mugabe suggested he may ask the Embassy to provide a neutral conference room, noting that neither side would be willing to meet at the other's offices.

¶13. (C) On past occasions (ref a), CFU President Doug Taylor-Freeme told us he now believes a merger with ICFU may be the only way to save the final 500-600 white owned farms (and possibly reclaim some land for the additional 500 white farmers still living in their farm-houses but no longer able to farm). Taylor-Freeme told us he can no longer defend the rights of dispossessed whites, many of whom have emigrated from Zimbabwe. He would be satisfied if he could secure tenure for about 1,000 members (down from 4,500 in 2000). If the CFU agrees to a merger, Taylor-Freeme said it would seek a guarantee from the GOZ that there would be no further farm expropriations. Taylor-Freeme insists Lands Minister John Nkomo has agreed to this in principle, if the CFU follows the advice of the Presidential Land Review Committee Report of August 2003 that there be a single non-racial commercial farmers union.

¶14. (C) Comment: Formal talks between the two commercial farmer bodies would be an important step toward reconciliation in Zimbabwe's tattered agricultural sector. It is a long-shot, but one worth urging along. Taylor-Freeme has admitted to us that a merger could divide his union and drive dissenters to the militant Justice for Agriculture (JAG). Ultimately, however, Taylor-Freeme knows time is not on the CFU's side. From a variety of sources, we estimate that the GOZ continues to expropriate about one farms per week. This is a far slower pace of acquisition than that of 2002, but suggests the CFU may run out of members at some point.  
Dell